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# Trail Plan
## New River Gorge National River
West Virginia

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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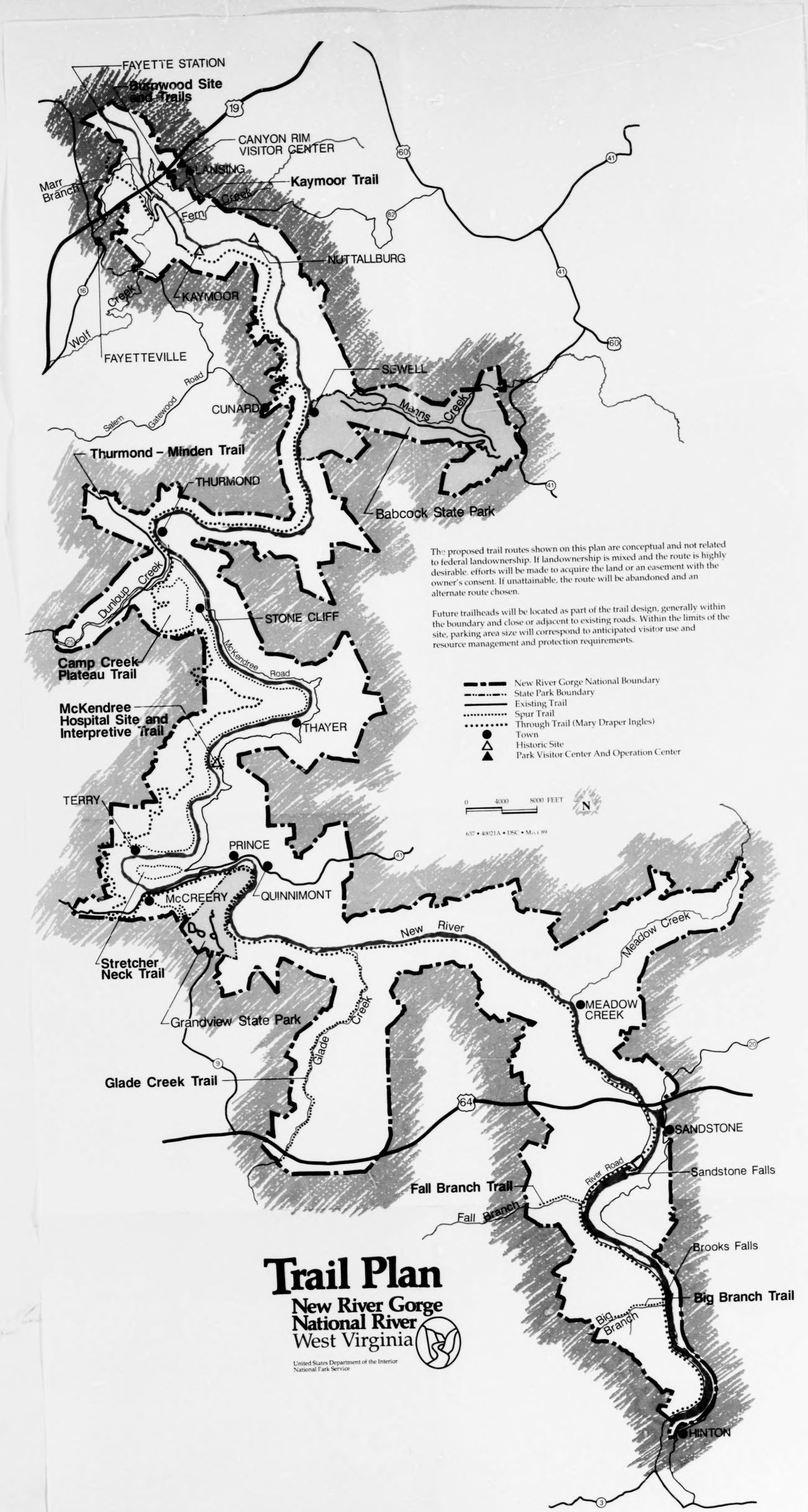


The proposed trail routes shown on this plan are conceptual and not related to federal landownership. If landownership is mixed and the route is highly desirable, efforts will be made to acquire the land or an easement with the owner's consent. If unattainable, the route will be abandoned and an alternate route chosen.

Future trailheads will be located as part of the trail design, generally within the boundary and close or adjacent to existing roads. Within the limits of the site, parking area size will correspond to anticipated visitor use and resource management and protection requirements.

- New River Gorge National Boundary
- State Park Boundary
- Existing Trail
- Spur Trail
- Through Trail (Mary Draper Ingles)
- Town
- Historic Site
- Park Visitor Center And Operation Center

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# Trail Plan

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## INTRODUCTION

Whether one is being carried along by the river's flow or enjoying occasional glimpses of the river's reflected surface while hiking, the experience is equally wondrous and necessary for a true and complete appreciation of New River Gorge National River.

When riding the river's current, one travels at the river's pace, feeling the exhilaration of the rapids or the peacefulness of a quiet pool. One moves through the forested landscape as a somewhat distant observer, always connected with the river's edge sliding by, but slightly insulated by a raft or boat.

When hiking the rim of the gorge or banks of the river, one travels at one's own pace. Each side valley, glade, or rock outcrop is distinct, offering variety in vegetation and the remains of earlier inhabitants. One can focus on the small, the intimate, and the subtle, in addition to the grand vistas.

Both hiking and boating place visitors in touch with the area's beauty and uniqueness. The goals of this *Trail Plan* are to provide a trail system that offers a complementary land perspective to a river experience, scenic views of the river and gorge, and visitor access to the natural and cultural resources of New River Gorge.

This *Trail Plan* is one element of several planning documents which together guide the development and resource management of New River Gorge National River. It provides the initial concepts of trail development within the national river but without a definitive layout of trails or access points. Specific trail alignments and primitive campsites will be chosen later, evolving with future need, landownership patterns, and external development trends. At the time when an alignment or site is selected, environmental and cultural compliance will be undertaken.

## TRAIL PLAN COMPONENTS

Four components make up the trail system: (1) a through-trail, (2) spur trails, (3) trails built in conjunction with major visitor use areas or developments, and (4) primitive trails.

### THE THROUGH-TRAIL

The national river's through-trail will tie into and be a portion of the longer Mary Draper Ingles Trail. This trail, which potentially will run from western Virginia to southern Ohio, is named after a courageous pioneer woman. In the late fall of 1755, she escaped from her Shawnee Indian abductors and endured a grueling 900-mile journey back to her home. A local trail club, also named in her honor, is working on the creation of this longer trail.

The through-trail will be on the left, or west, bank of the river. This side was chosen because the terrain is more suitable and there are more access points or potential trailhead locations.

This trail will allow hikers to experience the national river's varied natural and cultural resources. The northern portion of the gorge is the deepest, offering dramatic views of white water from rock outcrops and sheer rock walls along the escarpment. The central portion contains many areas of unusual plant and animal diversity as well as cultural sites related to the mining and transportation era. Remnants of mining days and other cultural resources dot the steep hillsides. The southern portion reflects an early agricultural and an existing pastoral scene.

The trail will enter New River Gorge National River at the north boundary near Marr Branch. It will wind through the deciduous forest below the rim, passing by Wolf Creek and Kaymoor, offering views of the cavernous gorge and river. Upon reaching the area known as Cunard, the trail will drop down to river level, providing hikers access to the river and its associated riparian environment. The trail will continue at river level, passing by coke ovens and other cultural remains of the coal mining era. When the trail reaches Thurmond, it will again climb up towards the gorge rim where more scenic views of the gorge and landforms, such as Stretcher Neck, can be seen.

Near Batoff Creek the trail will again descend to river level and cross through Grandview State Park, Glade Creek, and Sandstone Falls. This section of the gorge is a much gentler landscape and offers excellent opportunities for fishing, wildlife viewing, and hiking the occasional side drainages such as Glade and Mill creeks. At Fall Branch the trail leaves the river and ascends into the hardwood forest on Irish Mountain – a culturally rich area with a few still active settlements. It leaves the New River Gorge National River boundary in the vicinity of Hinton.

### SPUR TRAILS

Located on both sides of the river, spur trails will link access points from the river, roads, or the through-trail to outstanding natural and cultural features. Proposed or existing spur trails and areas of interest from south to north include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Kaymoor** – Site of one of the largest mining towns that operated from the early 1900s to the mid-1960s. Includes collection of industrial structures, such as headhouse, fan house, and mine entrances. Accessed from Route 82 at the Wolf Creek trailhead.

**Sewell** – Site of the oldest community in New River Gorge, containing remains of the mining, coking, and railroad industries, including railroad buildings and coke ovens. Accessed from Babcock State Park or potentially from Cunard by way of footbridge and railroad crossing.

**Thurmond-Minden Trail** – An existing trail following a railroad spur used to haul coal in the early 1900s. Connects two historic towns. Accessed from Route 25 and the river.

**Camp Creek Plateau** – An area of strip mines adjacent to the gorge rim, providing views of the central portion of the gorge. Accessed from Route 25 near the Thurmond-Minden trailhead.

**McKendree Hospital Site** – Foundations of a hospital developed to serve miners in 1901, and specializing in the treatment of mining-related diseases and injuries. Served as a nurses' training school until 1941. Accessed from McKendree Road.

**Stretcher Neck** – A point of land around which the river meanders, offering excellent views of the midsection of the gorge from the hilltop. Because the railroad tunnels through Stretcher Neck and away from the river, access is possible from the river at Army Camp and McKendree Road.

**Glade Creek** – A large pristine, wooded tract of land encompassing wetlands, forest, and streams, and offering excellent trout fishing and backcountry hiking experiences. Accessed from the river and Route 307.

**Sandstone Falls Boardwalk** – A trail being developed that passes lightly through a unique habitat area, offering views of the New River and Sandstone Falls.

**Fall Branch** – A side valley following a historic railroad adjacent to Fall Branch drainage, and offering intimate views of an exposed sandstone wall, waterfalls, and pools. Accessed from the proposed parkway and existing Route 26 (River Road).

**Big Branch** – A side valley following Big Branch drainage that supports a moist plant habitat and contains waterfalls, exposed sandstone, and overgrown ruins. Accessed from the proposed New River Parkway and existing Route 26 (River Road).

These natural and cultural resources will be made availabie to visitors consistent with safety concerns, ecological considerations, and interpretive values and goals.

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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### TRAILS BUILT IN CONJUNCTION WITH MAJOR VISITOR USE AREAS OR DEVELOPMENTS

These trails will be designed to serve a variety of users, provide interpretation on-site, and perhaps facilitate specialized purposes such as environmental education classes. They will be designed in keeping with the character of the site's development. Examples of potential trail locations include Sandstone Falls boardwalk, Canyon Rim, Thurmond-Minden Trail, the yet-to-be-determined southern visitor center site, the New River Parkway, and Kaymoor. These trail systems will be included in the area development concept plans.

### PRIMITIVE TRAILS

There are trails throughout the park that have been created over time by wildlife, native Americans, early settlers, or local user groups such as fishermen, horseback riders, rock climbers, and hunters. These trails will be analyzed by the park or development concept plans to determine if they should be publicized, maintained, improved, or eliminated to serve a broader segment of the visiting public. Conversely, some trails may be allowed to return to a natural state if they are no longer needed.

## RELATED TRAIL SYSTEM CONCEPTS

### COOPERATION WITH THE STATE PARKS

Two major state parks, Babcock and Grandview, lie within the national river boundary. Both attract thousands of visitors annually and provide hiking opportunities. Babcock has 20 miles of trails, ranging from a short nature hike to a wilderness trail leading to the banks of the New River. Grandview has a spectacular 2-mile rim trail as well as trails that take visitors through caves and woodland habitats. The National Park Service considers these parks as complementary attractions playing a major role in the visitor's experience at New River. Trail systems should be connected wherever feasible and agreeable with state park management.

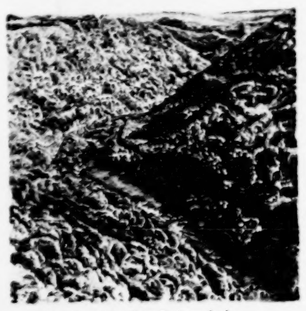
### OVERNIGHT CAMPSITES

A limited number of primitive sites will be developed in conjunction with the through-trail. Site locations will depend on terrain, adequate water supply, and distance from the trail and river. Resource impacts will be monitored and mitigated as required.

### DESIGNATION OF TRAIL USE

The use of trails for horseback riding, administrative/emergency use, bicycling, etc., will be allowed through designation by the superintendent if deemed legal, necessary, and appropriate. If designation of these other uses does not occur for a specific trail, trails will be for pedestrian use only.

Hiking in the gorge



View from Grandview State Park overlook

Sandstone Falls

## GUIDELINES FOR TRAIL DESIGN

### FUTURE TRAIL DESIGN

For the immediate future, old roads and existing trails will be used frequently in the new trail system because they provide access to many of the areas identified as having outstanding natural and cultural features and recreational opportunities. Many of the old roads also provide a link between these features and opportunities. Additionally, by using existing roads and trails rather than constructing new ones, there is reduced impact on natural and cultural resources and it is more cost-effective. However, since these existing roads and trails were built for different purposes, the eventual trail system for New River will reevaluate this network, eliminating some routes and redesigning others.

Any redesign will be based on aesthetics, engineering, resource protection and interpretation, recreation planning, and social values. Aesthetic considerations such as variety, balance, and scale are used to provide drama, surprise, and impact for the visitor. A well-engineered trail ensures safety, ease of maintenance, and resource protection. Interpretation gives the visitor a better understanding of the resources and their significance and his/her relationship to them. Recreation goals will permit greater opportunities for healthy exercise and physical challenge as well as access to unique cultural and natural resources. Opportunities for social interaction will be included in design details such as trail widths and rest stops.

### CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The trail classification system at New River Gorge will have three standards: low use, moderate use, and high use. The primary difference between the three standards is the types of areas in which the trails are constructed, the anticipated use, and the amount of development associated with the trail.

#### Low Use Trails

These trails will be associated with primitive or wild areas such as Glade Creek, and are intended for hikers who prefer a backcountry experience away from others. Low use trails are narrow (wide enough for one hiker), with few improvements such as bridges.

#### Moderate Use Trails

These trails frequently will be associated with many of the old roads and railroad beds throughout New River. They will be formalized and used for hiking trails, such as the existing trail to the Kaymoor mine. Moderate use trails are intended for a broader range of users and will have slightly wider widths. A few structures such as bridges and shelters will be constructed. Some interpretive signs may be used on these trails.

#### High Use Trails

These trails are primarily associated with developed areas, such as the Canyon Rim Visitor Center and the new boardwalk trail at Sandstone Falls. The trail surface will be hardened to accommodate less-experienced hikers and to protect the resource from anticipated high use. High use trails will be associated with interpretive exhibits where appropriate. Bridges, rest stops, handrails, guardrails, and benches will be constructed where necessary. Some high use trails may be accessible to handicapped individuals; however, not all high use trails will meet this criteria.

### HANDICAP-ACCESSIBLE TRAILS

Handicap-accessible trails will be provided to enable visitors with special needs to experience New River Gorge National River. These trails will be primarily associated with developed areas such as Canyon Rim, Sandstone Falls, Thurmond, the yet-to-be-determined southern visitor center site, and Kaymoor. Trail surfaces will be hardened and constructed wide enough to accommodate two-way wheelchair traffic. Handrails, rest stops, and ramps will be constructed as necessary.

### SIGNS

All major trailheads will have signs designed consistent with the park's overall sign system. Signs will include information on the trail's length and destination, degree of difficulty, and association/proximity to other trails. If the trail follows a historic route, this fact may also be included.

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